The
Thoreau Society Bulletin

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The Walden Club of London

Lonnie Willis

My brush with the Walden Club of London really began when I read Walter Harding's paragraph in *The Recognition of Henry David Thoreau* (p. 317), explaining how Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England* (1893) helped popularize Thoreau in England. Not only did the cranky Blatchford sleep with a copy of *Walden* under his pillow, said Harding, but his book encouraged Labour Party locals to call themselves "Walden Clubs" (p. 318).

Not sure what Walter Harding's source was for this British name-dropping custom, I was alert for notices about "Walden Clubs" while I carried on some research about the Labour Movement in the British Library. However, I never found his evidence.

Then, while reading in the Library one day, I came upon a short-lived journal titled *Igdrasil*, published by the Ruskin Guild. (Looking up the title in the *Larouse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, I found that "Yggdrasil" is the great ash tree that symbolizes Divine Life in Norse mythology.) And in the January– September, 1890 index to the first volume of *Igdrasil: A Magazine of Literature, Art and Social Philosophy*, occurred this notation: "Walden Club, June Supplement xiii." Here was evidence of a Walden Club in London, and it preceded the Labour Party locals by several years.

Calling up the "Supplement," I found a two-page description of a "recent meeting" of The Walden Club for a discussion of "The Influence of John Ruskin." Among the officers and readers of papers that day were A. Lauber, S. M. Peartree, F. C. Wheeler, J. C. Smart, and J. F. L. Whelen. By reading the complete Volume One of *Igdrasil* I learned that "[m]any of these gentlemen [were] active members of kindred literary societies," and I resolved two names: Sidney Montagu Peartree and James P. Smart. But it was Mr. J. F. L. Whelen who interested me most because he was the Honourable Secretary of The Walden Club, and therefore my best chance for tracking down this elusive society. Thus, I went to the city directory for London for the year of the meeting, 1890, and I learned that Mr. Whelen was an "unattached clerk" in the Bank of England and that he lived on Primrose Hill Road. When I checked a street guide to London, one that provided the post routes, I located him at 73 Fellows Road. Search as I did, I could find no other information on Mr. Whelen or his Walden Club. By this time, however, J. F. L. Whelen had become for me the living symbol of the London Walden Club, and I was determined to track him to his lair. Maybe there would be a pond at 73 Fellows Road!

I took the tube out to his part of London, walked until I located his street, then searched for his address. I found on the site of 73 Fellows Road a twenty-story council building, all cement and gray, though on the other side of the road the buildings were still nineteenth-century, looking as they would have in Whelen's day. Across the road from number 73, an elderly woman was trimming her hedge; so it occurred to me that she might shed some light on the fate of the neighborhood, and I approached her. Upon my inquiry, which she took without any more sympathy than Thoreau might have, she snapped, "I don't give out information." Trying to pacify her suspicion of American strangers, I explained that I did not want "information," only to ask what the buildings across the road might have looked like in 1890. "I didn't live here then" was her unassailable reply.

But with that said, I felt somehow that I had made progress along the trail of the now-lost Mr. J. F. L. Whelen, late Honourable Secretary of the London Walden Club. Even Thoreau once confessed, "I have lost a hound dog, a horse, and a turtle dove."

What is religion? That which is never spoken.
–Journal, *18 August 1858*

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A Thoreau Portrayal: Henry David in the Moralist Tradition

Theodore P. Fraser

[Editor's Note: Theodore P. Fraser was chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literature at Holy Cross College from 1972 to 1980 and from 1990 to 1994, and is the founder and director of Studies in European Literature. He is the author of The Moralist Tradition in France *(1982),* The French Essay *(1986), and* The Modern Catholic Novel in Europe *(1994).]*

Henry David Thoreau is one of the great moralists of the European tradition. By this nomenclature is meant not professional philosophers concerned with *la morale* or the discipline of moral philosophy, but rather writers who have for their object an analysis of the human heart with special emphasis on the understanding of motive and conduct. And the title "moralist" has been conferred on such commanding authors as Montaigne, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Rousseau, Voltaire, Lichtenberg, and Nietzsche, among the most important. Virtually the only American critically recognized as belonging to this group, Thoreau shares the predilection of these illustrious predecessors in both topic and literary form. Viewing man as he is—neither sinner nor saint but more a composite of each, hence capable of stunning virtue and deplorable vice—he does not conduct his study of human nature along theoretical or abstract lines but strives to give concrete application to his findings. Hence he exposes human failings through observation and analysis, and suggests norms or principles of conduct which would aid him and his fellows to live *á propos*, or decently, to use one of Montaigne's favorite expressions.

Like the great moralists in this European tradition, Thoreau composes throughout his writings brilliant aphorisms (*maximes*), precepts, and commentary in order to describe, but also to judge, the moral aspects involved in the many pressing concerns he sees present in his own society or in the human condition. Unlike so many American authors of the nineteenth-century, he eschews the tendency to deal with the human quotient idealistically, as in the genteel tradition. Rather, he saw and dared to expose the dark side of human nature surrounding motivation and action on the political and social levels. In a journal entry for 15 June

Jeffrey Hyatt as Henry Thoreau

1840 he succinctly expresses this goal of objective honesty as follows: "Why always insist that men incline to the moral side of their being? Our life is not all moral. Surely, its actual phenomena deserve to be studied impartially." This predilection to deal with human beings as they really are is at least as important a characteristic of his work as the more commonly noted "transcendental" elements of nature worship so often ascribed to him. (In fact, his penetration to the "soul of nature" is really an extension of his effort to go beyond the superficial aspects of things.)

Yet Thoreau "americanizes" the moralist tradition of Europe by going beyond the rather somber, pessimistic sententiae composed by Pascal (man living between two absolutes, hence miserable in his condition) and La Rochefoucauld (man ever the victim of ego, self-deceit, and the social pose). As aware of the downward tugs of human character as his European counterparts, Thoreau does not accept for a moment the doctrine that we are willy-nilly the victims of our dark passions or merely the sum of our hereditary or societal givens. As human beings, we need to be made aware of our inner resources, of our uniqueness, and of the touch of the divine that resides in each of us and allows us to confront and contest the foibles, stupidities, and evils of injustice that are abroad in any given age. From the evil of slavery to the dishonesty and cynicism of politicians, to the incipient rise of consumerism and of living not with blessed simplicity but indulging in spiritually harmful superfluities, Thoreau is absolutely contemporary as he lashes out in defiant and vigorous language against all the manifestations that he sees of these problems in his microcosm of Concord and in the world at large.

Henry Thoreau gives as his ultimate moral lesson his exemplary determination not to wait passively for the world to become what we want it to be. Rather, he sets out to affect it through his committed writings and action. For no one will accomplish anything, he suggests, unless they live out their ideals and put their life on the line through their own example and witness. And what he passionately commits himself to is a society that would accept simplicity as its ideal and not the worship of material things, which drain human beings of their spiritual propensities and human dignity. In this way he directed his entire intellectual and emotional life to resist these forces that would make us less than we could and should be.

Such is the magnificent legacy of Henry David Thoreau so lovingly reconstructed by Jeffrey Hyatt in his wise and moving dramatic monologue of this author's most intimate thoughts and world view, which I was privileged to attend some months ago in Concord, Massachusetts. Hyatt has managed to create a marvelously complete verbal fresco of the major ideas and themes that resonate through the entire corpus of Thoreau's work. His monologue, artfully rendered with subtle humor and intense, effective passion, constitutes a seamless garment so skillfully stitched together that the audience is never really aware of the superb melding of passages drawn from virtually all segments of Thoreau's writings. And we twentieth-century spectators very soon are caught up with the compelling power and strength of ideas honestly and fearlessly expressed without the sugar-coated banalities and shibboleths that unfortunately pass for intellectual and political discourse in our modern age of double speak and manufactured sound bite. In this Concord theatre we heard once again an inspiring voice that might still shake us out of our lethargy to dream and encourage us to become what is best within us.

Notes from Thoreau Country

Helen Bowdoin

At its January meeting, the Society's Board of Directors voted unanimously to establish a committee to advocate for the conservation of Thoreau Country. Readers of this column are familiar with the recent success in preserving four hundred additional acres to buffer Concord's Estabrook Woods. In reality, however, Estabrook's core continues to be threatened by Middlesex School's plans for a major campus expansion. Though enormous progress is being made to protect Thoreau's Virginia Road birthplace, it, too, is in danger—in this instance of becoming another suburban development tract.

At the heart of Thoreau Country, the nagging questions surrounding the management of Walden Pond State Reservation are looming larger. Those of you who come to Walden this year will see the large-scale bank stabilization and restoration project underway, an effort by the state to correct years of damage from severe erosion. We've learned that Walden now receives close to 650,000 visitors each year, people who want to swim, fish, walk, run, skate, picnic, rest, meditate, study, and—good luck to this last group—find peace and quiet and a small share of the solitude cherished there by Henry Thoreau.

With such intensive use placing mounting pressures on the pond and surrounding land, the Board believes it is time for the Society to become active stewards for Walden. Groups representing swimmers and fishermen have always been vocal. While these user groups lobby for bigger portions of state budgets to support their interests, the pond and landscape are left without effective advocacy. The Board agreed that the Society can no longer stand on the sidelines when Walden's ecological health and long-term sustainability appear at risk.

Before moving ahead, however, the Board wants to hear from the membership. What role, if any, would you like to see the Society take on these issues? Bring your thoughts and suggestions to the Annual Gathering in July. Or call or write Tom Harris, Managing Director of the Society, in Lincoln (see back page for telephone, postal, and e-mail addresses). We need to hear your views!

Summer Activities

Katahdin Excursion 26–29 June

To commemorate the 150th anniversary of Thoreau's ascent of Mt. Katahdin, the Society is sponsoring a trip to Baxter State Park in Maine. Society member Burton Chandler has organized a four-day excursion to include a lobster/clambake in Ogunquit; stopovers in Orono, Old Town, and Mattawamkeag (towns where Thoreau stopped on his trip); and a full day in Baxter State Park. There are many other outdoor activities available at the park—hiking Katahdin is optional. We will hold a special event on Saturday night to thank officials at Baxter State Park for their preservation efforts in the area.

If you are interested in the trip, please contact Burton Chandler (508) 757-7721 (daytime) or (508) 799-5803 (evenings). We need to hear from you as soon as possible!

Summer Seminar for High School Teachers, 30 June –12 July

The Thoreau Institute will kick off its educational programming with "Thoreau's World and Ours," a workshop for local high-school teachers. Program Director Helen Bowdoin has put together a comprehensive, two-week course with an interdisciplinary focus on the area in and around Concord and Lincoln, Massachusetts. Guest speakers will include experts in the fields of archeology, land planning, literature, history, Thoreau studies, geography, forestry, botany, mapping, computer science, and library science. Studying the interconnections of Concord's and Lincoln's varied histories will provide students with models for approaching their home communities and for deepening their commitment to responsible land stewardship. Although this seminar has been filled, it is only the first of many teacher workshops to be held at the Thoreau Institute.

Thoreau Society Annual Gathering 10-13 July

The Society's annual gathering will focus on Thoreau and his relevance in the twenty-first century. Conservation will likely be one of the great issues facing this nation and the world in the coming century, and this year's gathering will reflect those concerns. Our main speaker will be David Brower, one of the most well-known and influential conservationists since Aldo Leopold.

Other activities will include a lecture by John Hanson Mitchell; canoeing on the Concord and Sudbury Rivers; hiking on Mt. Monadnock; tours of the Thoreau Institute with a Thoreau art exhibit; and workshops on Thoreau Country preservation issues, publishing of Thoreau's writings, current research, nature writing, Emerson, and peace.

This is the first year we are requiring a registration fee from everyone participating in the gathering. The $15 fee ($40 for non-members) covers all workshops, the Mitchell lecture, and many of the activities. Some activities and events, including the David Brower lecture, will require a separate donation to cover our costs.

As we have in the past, the Society will offer lodging packages at the Concord Academy. Rooms at the Academy are dormitory style and will include breakfast only.

The deadline for registration is 1 July; payment is due at that time. The deadline for payment also applies to anyone who has pre-registered. If you would like further information about the meeting or are interested in information about alternative lodging, please contact Tom Harris at the Thoreau Society office (see back page for telephone, postal, and e-mail addresses).

Notes and Queries

On 24 February, the PBS series, "Where in Time Is Carmen Sandiego?" aired a show featuring Walden Pond. In show #136, "Female Greenpeace Activist," Walden Pond is stolen. We have been unable to obtain a copy of the program, so we do not know whether it was returned before the end of the show.

On 26 October 1996, the North American Kaleidoscope, a concert series created by the Dale Warland Singers to "explore and celebrate America's musical heritage," featured Dominick Argento's commissioned work, *Walden Pond: Nocturnes and Barcaroles for Mixed Chorus, Three Violincellos and Harp.* The performance took place at the Ted Mann Concert Hall in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In a 14 January 1997 article in the *Boston Globe*, "Proposed Curriculum Standards Under Fire," new educational standards are analyzed. One criticism cited in the article relates to Emerson and Thoreau: "In some cases, teachers say, the new standards are not age-appropriate. For example, social studies students in kindergarten through fourth grade are expected to describe Ralph Waldo Emerson's and Henry David Thoreau's impact on New England political and social culture, as well as discuss the founding of Harvard University."

"A Day at Walden Pond" is wanting to be heard! Composed by Jean King of Lincoln, the music is comprised of five sketches: *Morning, High Noon, Evening, Night,* and *Smoke as Incense Rising from the Hearth.* Approximately 17 minutes long, the work is scored for woodwinds, strings, and percussion. Anyone interested in performing this piece, with the prospect of recording, please contact Jean at (617) 259-0032.

Edward Johnson of Jasper, Indiana, informs us that on page F1 of the *Louisville* (Kentucky) *Courier-Journal* (28 October 1996), alongside an article "Singled Out" about various aspects of the single life, Thoreau is pictured along with Queen Elizabeth I of England as a famous person who never married. Other such persons (15 or so) include Joan of Arc, Chopin, Newton, Voltaire, Jane Austen, Beethoven, and President James Buchanan. Source: Book of Lists.

Christian Warncke writes: "Dear Members: I have lived in this resort area of the central Oregon Coast between Newport and Lincoln City about twenty years, very close to what has recently been designated 'Siletz Bay National Wildlife Refuge' by Congress. I invite any communications regarding Thoreauvian visits or retreats to the area. I am interested in meeting old/new members and at this time have a accommodations available in our home for approximately one to six guests who enjoy taking care of their own needs. Write me at Box 891 Glenden, OR 97388."

The 14 November 1996 issue of the *Maine Times* (vol. 29, no. 4) is dedicated to books and bookstores. On the front cover is a graphic of an open book, the enlarged text of which serves as background. The book is not identified, but the graphic includes the well-known words, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately...." Allison Wallace of Troy, Maine, recognized the graphic as text from the "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" chapter of *Walden* and sent us this note.

National Geographic (January 1997) mentions that the lighthouse on Cape Cod, about which Thoreau writes in 1855, "Erelong, the lighthouse must be moved," was, in fact, moved in July 1996. The 400-ton lighthouse was an 1857 replacement of the one Thoreau observed just two years earlier. Eroding cliffs endangered the Highland Light, which is now operating once again at its new location.

Jim Dawson of Trappe, Maryland, sent in a copy of a 1906 circular advertising Houghton-Mifflin's Walden Edition of Thoreau's writings. Along with the regular cloth bound set, the circular advertises a half-morocco style edition.

Timothy Lalley of Waxhaw, North Carolina, writes: "In the September 1996 issue of *Hope Health Letter*, published by the Hope Heart Institute of Seattle, Washington, there is a Thoreau reference on page 3. In a section entitled 'Stress' there is the following: 'Had Enough? Your "Simplicity" Reading List *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau.' There follow four more books and three magazines."

LA Weekly (13 December 1996) reports that a thirty-foot-tall piece of art has become a center of controversy in West Hollywood, California. The steel-and-fiberglass tower "awash in tangerine, vermillion and electric blue" was designed by a Mexican artist as a monument to AIDS and ethnic unity. The "bird-faced caricatures" blowing on saxophones while in the embrace of "interlocking hands" has become an eyesore to some residents, who want the sculpture removed. While the taste of the artist may be in dispute, there is no doubt that the inscription from Thoreau contains a misspelling: "It is never to late to give up our prejudices" (the first "to" should be "too").

Concluding the Thoreau Society weekend on Sunday, 13 July, is a concert of flute duets to be performed at Fruitlands Museums in Harvard, Massachusetts, at 2:30 p.m. The music for the duets was transcribed by Edward Scibilia from the handwritten Thoreau family flute books. The flute duets were first performed at Fruitlands in 1993 as part of a musical program that also included a piece Mr. Scibilia composed to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Bronson Alcott's experiment in communal living at Fruitlands. The flute books are owned by Orchard House and have been exhibited at the Concord Museum. The concert in July will be held outside the Fruitlands farmhouse and will include readings from the writings of Thoreau. The performance will be free with admission to the museum.

On Sunday, 13 July, at 3 p.m., the Concord Museum and the Concord Bookshop will offer a talk and book signing by Gary Collison, author of the new book *Shadrack Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen.* The Concord Museum is located at 200 Lexington Road, Concord, Massachusetts.

The Society will set up an information booth at the first "Backpacking Is In-Tents" Hiking & Environmental Festival on Sunday, 20 July, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. GNP Graphics and Design has organized the festival to be held at 18 Hartford Avenue in Granby, Connecticut. For more information call (860) 653-0529.

Secretary's Column

Bradley P. Dean

Recently I submitted my resignation to the Board of Directors and will cease being your secretary at this coming annual meeting, when Joel Myerson will assume that position. I will continue to edit this bulletin, with the ongoing and able assistance of Tom Harris. I also expect to remain active on certain Society committees and particularly at the Thoreau Institute's Media Center.

An exciting development relating to the Institute's Media Center occurred over the past few months. Last December I met with fellow Board member Kathi Anderson at her office in Boston. I had come up from North Carolina to do some research and to work with Kathi on various Institute-related matters, including the drafting of a letter to Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) of Maynard, Massachusetts, appealing to DEC for assistance with our computing needs at the Institute. Kathi and I completed the letter by about 10 a.m., and I set out to do some research in the Boston area, returning to Kathi's office at about 3 p.m. to find Kathi on the phone with a gentleman named Gregg Laird from DEC.

After Kathi put us on her speakerphone, Gregg explained that he is in charge of DEC's Windows NT Wizards Program and that the Wizards (there are about 120 of them at various locations around the world) were to meet at the Washington State Convention Center in Seattle for a five-day symposium in early March 1997. Each year, Gregg continued, the Wizards convene with various computer representatives and vendors, and they select a non-profit organization with computing needs to participate in the symposium. Gregg works in Acton, Massachusetts, where DEC has an office, and had heard that the Thoreau Institute planned to have a media center with a database, Internet access, and other technological components. Feeling that the Thoreau Institute's mission was both worthy and international in scope, Gregg had called Kathi to find out if he and his group of Wizards could help. That Gregg called Kathi on the very day she and I had composed a letter of appeal to DEC's Director of Corporate Donations was sheer coincidence.

From 3 to 7 March 1997 Kathi, Juliet, and I, along with Helen Bowdoin (the Institute's Director of Educational Programs), Scott Beyers (chair of the Society's Multimedia Subcommittee), and Tom McShane (public-relations consultant for the Walden Woods Project), worked several hours each day with about twenty Wizards whom Gregg had selected for their expertise and level of interest in our project. During those five days participants in the Thoreau Institute session determined what the hardware, software, and computing-related service needs will be at the Institute and established a timeline and list of tasks for the project. Although we are still working out the details, DEC has pledged to donate to the Institute five servers (one each to handle the database, Website, mail system, and firewall, and one for handling remote-computer access) and twenty-four computer workstations, as well as an impressive list of peripherals, a list which includes a 200GB storage device, a tape-backup system, printers, scanners, and digital cameras.

Microsoft and several other software and hardware companies have pledged to supplement DEC's donation with other items. Notable among the hardware donors is Lucent Technologies, which has pledged to donate telephone, network, and other communications equipment needed to make the Institute a state-of-the-art research and educational institution. Finally, to provide high-speed Internet access, the Institute will have a T-1 line installed very soon; and Jacobson Rost, an advertising firm in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, has been designing a Website for the Society, the Walden Woods Project, and the Institute—a project which has been supported by a generous $10,000 grant from the Park Foundation.

Through the generosity of DEC and these many other corporate and institutional donors, future visitors to the Institute, both real and virtual, will have at their disposal some of the world's most technologically sophisticated tools. What we do with those tools is up to those of us who opt to use them. Of course. And, of course, those of us who opt to use them need to guard against becoming the tools of those tools. To Thoreauvians, that should go without saying. Still, I for one feel profoundly grateful when I think of the collections and the technologies we will soon have at the Institute, and I am deeply excited by what we might accomplish by using those technologies to make our valuable collections more widely available. Surely there are bright days ahead for the Thoreau Society and for Thoreau studies generally.

We fancy that this din of religion, literature, and philosophy, which is heard in pulpits, lyceums, and parlors, vibrates through the universe, and is as catholic a sound as the creaking of the earth's axle; but if a man sleep soundly, he will forget it all between sunset and dawn.

– A Natural History of Massachusetts

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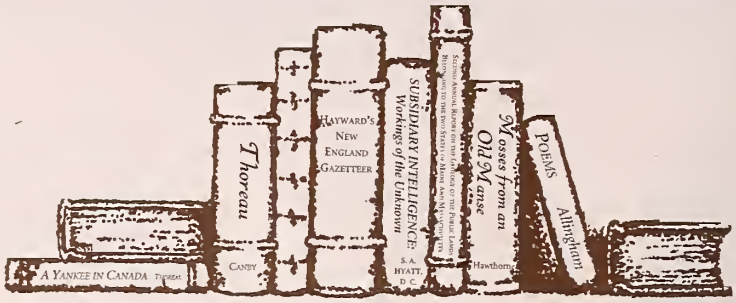

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This bibliography was compiled with contributions from B. Dean, V. Friesen, A. Gardiner, M. Harding, P. Huber, R. McCabe, D. Scheese, and R. Winslow III.

If I have missed any books, articles, or other relevant material, please let me know. Send any additions or corrections to Thomas S. Harris, The Thoreau Society, 44 Baker Farm, Lincoln, MA 01773-3004 U.S.A. (e-mail: TTSHarris@aol.com). Please, whenever possible, send a copy of the book, article, or other materials so that we can include it in the Thoreau Society's collection at the Thoreau Institute.

When I detect a beauty in any of the recesses of nature, I am reminded, by the serene and retired spirit in which it requires to be contemplated, of the inexpressible privacy of a life,—how silent and unambitious it is. The beauty there is in mosses must be considered from the holiest, quietest nook.

–A Natural History of Massachusetts

If with closed ears and eyes I consult consciousness for a moment—immediately are all walls and barriers dissipated—earth rolls from under me, and I float, by the impetus derived from the earth and the system—a subjective—heavily laden thought, in the midst of an unknown & infinite sea, or else heave and swell like a vast ocean of thought—without rock or headland. Where are all riddles solved, all straight lines making there their two ends to meet—eternity and space gambolling familiarly through my depths. I am from the beginning—knowing no end, no aim. No sun illumines me,—for I dissolve all lesser lights in my own intenser and steadier light—I am a restful kernel in the magazine of the universe.

—*Journal*, August, 1838

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